AN

ESSAY

On the Large Common *American* ALOE,

WITH

A Particular ACCOUNT of that which is
now in BLOOM in the Gardens of

GEORGE MONTGOMERIE, Eſq;

AT

Chippenham near *Newmarket* in the County of
CAMBRIDGE.

By JAMES SPENCER, Gardener.

Printed and Sold by WILLIAM GREEN, Stationer in
Cook-Row, Bury St. Edmund's; and by JOHN
CRICK, School-maſter, at Chippenham aforeſaid.
M DCC LIX.

RPJCB

PREFACE
TO THE
READER.

T*HERE having been ſo many different Accounts related concerning the* Aloe *that is in* Chippenham *Gardens, ſome giving out that it was dying a Month or ſix Weeks ago, others that it would never blow,* &c. *I thought proper to inform the Publick, that it is now in Bloom, and as healthful and ſtrong as any Plant of the Kind has ever been in the like Circumſtances, having twelve Branches in Bloſſom.*

It would have been very difficult in a Performance like that I now offer to the Public to give a Hiſtory of every Aloe *of this Sort that has Blown in* England, *as the Time to do this in was ſo very ſhort; but what I have already mentioned will, I hope, be ſufficient to give the Reader ſome Idea of what he may expect when he comes to ſee it, eſpecially as the Frontiſpiece is a true and exact Draught of it, to which I refer the Reader, and am his Well-wiſher and*

humble Servant,

JAMES SPENCER.

CHAP. I.

Of the large common AMERICAN ALOE.

THIS Plant has been known in *England* a great many Years; for *Parkinſon*, in his Theatre of Plants, takes Notice of it, who wrote in the Reigns of Queen *Elizabeth* and King *James* the Firſt.

The firſt that was brought into *England* came with Sir *Walter Raleigh* and Sir *Henry Carew*, who likewiſe were the firſt Gentlemen who made Tobacco, and the Orange-Tree familiar to us.

This Plant, at its firſt Arrival here, was put into a Pit, and cover'd in the Winter with Boards.

A Society of FLORISTS gave it the Name of the *Perſian* ALOE, according to their uſual Cuſtom of giving Names to every extraordinary Flower that is produced; and as it was eſteemed a great Curioſity, in one of the noble Gardens of *Perſia*, it was thought as proper as any Name that might be given an Auricula, or a Carnation; ſuch as the Glory of *Chippenham*, the Glory of *Hoxton*, the Glory of *Reading*, the Glory of *Windſor*, and ſuch like.

Another Sort of curious Men compared its Figure to *Moſes*'s Candleſtick, as it is repreſented in the *Jewiſh* Hiſtory by *Joſephus*; or the famous branched Candleſtick, repreſented in the Draught of the Temple of *Solomon*: and the Shape of both being ſo near alike, it was received and allowed by many Spectators to deſerve that Name.

But, according to the Botaniſts, it muſt however be allow'd to be a Native of *America*, from whence it was firſt brought to *Europe*. It was ſo agreeable to the *Spaniſh* Climate, that it grew there in the natural Ground, without any Shelter.

From *Spain* it was firſt brought into *France*, where it bloſſomed about 110 Years ago, and was about 100 Years old when it blow'd.

And here I cannot forbear taking Notice of a vulgar Error or two relating to the large *American* ALOE, which is, that it never flowers until it is an Hundred Years old, which is a Miſtake; and ſince we have had ſeveral of them flower in *England*, ſome of which were known not to exceed 50 Years old; and others, which flower'd many Years ago, cannot be ſuppoſed to have been in *England* ſo long as to arrive at that Age, ſince they were thought too tender for our Climate at that Time, when Green-houſes were not known.

Another common Error is, that when the Flower opens, it makes a Report like that of firing a Gun: This is ſufficiently confuted by all thoſe who have been where theſe Plants have flower'd; but I ſuppoſe the Riſe of this Story might proceed from ſome Perſons ſaying, when one of theſe Plants flower'd, it made a great Noiſe; meaning thereby, that when one of them flower'd in *England*, it was ſpread abroad as an uncommon Thing, and occaſioned a great Noiſe amongſt the neighbouring Inhabitants, moſt of whom uſually repair to ſee it, as a Thing that rarely happens, and as a great Curioſity.

This Conſtruction may be allowed to be good, ſince the Blooming of the ALOE at *Chippenham-Hall* has drawn ſo many hundred Perſons to ſee it from ſeveral Parts of the Kingdom, it being allowed to be as large a Plant as has been ſeen in *England*.

The firſt ALOE that attempted to bloſſom in *England*, was in Mr. *Verſprit*'s Garden at *Lambeth*, which is ſaid to come from one of thoſe that were brought hither in Sir *Walter Raleigh*'s Time; ſo that it might perhaps be a hundred Years old when it puſhed forth its Flower Stalk, which was in the Reign of King *William* the Third.

The Account of this Plant is related as follows: It ſhot forth a long and large Stem about *Auguſt*, which branched like a Tree, and every Branch contained a large Cluſter of Bloſſoms and Buds. The Seaſon of the Year being towards a Time when exotick Plants requir'd houſing, a Glaſs Caſe was built on purpoſe for its Shelter, but either through the Fault of the Workmen, or the extraordinary high Winds which followed, the Glaſs Caſe was blown down, and the Flowering Stem of the Plant broken from the Root.

It was the extraordinary ſhooting of the flowering Stem, and the great Height it arrived to, (which was about 18 or 20 Feet high) made Mr. *Verſprit* build a Shelter on purpoſe for it; becauſe his Conſervatory would not hold it, as it then proceeded in Growth.

King WILLIAM and Queen MARY, who cultivated the moſt curious of *Exotick Plants* and Flowers in *England*, order'd a Draught to be taken by Mr. *Bogdane*, a famous Painter ; ſome of which Branches painted, are now in one of the Royal Palaces.

The next ALOES which appeared among us in *Flower*, were the two at the Royal Gardens in *Hampton-Court*, which came from the ſame Breed as the former; when theſe flower'd, they were in extraordinary Strength, even ſo great, that one of them brought five, and the other ſeven Stems of Flowers: every Stem branched like a regular Tree, and each Branch was loaded with Bloſſoms, which dropt Honey in abundance from every Flower. They laſted the greateſt Part of the Winter in Bloſſom, though they were not houſed; and even the Spring following attempted to make new Branches, though the Plants in their Leaves began to rot towards their Roots, and in their decaying State were thrown into the *Thames*; ſo that we do not certainly know what Appearance they would have made the Summer following. The talleſt of their Stems was about 17 or 18 Feet high, and the Leaves about 5 Feet long each, or rather more. They ſhot in their Stems about 6 or 7 Inches a Day.

In the Year 1716, one of the large Sort of *American* ALOES, bloſſom'd in his Grace the Duke of BUCKINGHAM'S Garden in St. *James*'s *Park*; but this had only a ſingle Stem about 16 or 17

Feet high, branched like a regular Tree, and bearing ſuch Flowers as the two great ALOES did at *Hampton-Court*; but the Plant ſtood abroad, and died the ſame Winter.

A few Years after this, a Plant of the ſame ALOE bloſſomed in the Gardens of PRINCE EUGENE, near *Vienna*, which was ſtrong enough to bring ſeveral Flower Stems, adorned with Branches and Flowers like thoſe at *Hampton-Court*. It was computed to be near a hundred Years old, and was accounted ſo extraordinary in its Kind, that its Fame ſoon ſpread over *Europe*, the Foreign News-Papers being filled with Encomiums of its Grandeur and Beauty.

About 35 or 36 Years ago, there was another attempted to bloſſom in the Right Honourable the Earl of CASTLEMAIN's fine Gardens at *Wanſted* in *Eſſex*, but was unfortunately blown down ſeveral times by high Winds, which broke and bruiſed the Plant ſo much, that it did not live to bloſſom in its full Vigour, and make that fine Appearance which Nature had deſigned it for. When that

Plant decay'd, there were no more than nine Branches upon the Stem.

About 30 Years ago another great *American* ALOE bloſſomed at *Hoxton* in the Garden of Mr. *Cowell*, of which he gives the following ACCOUNT.

It began to open its Crown for flowering; that is, its central Leaf, or middle Spire, (as ſome Gardeners call it,) began to ſplit and crack, and the Centre of the whole Plant ſwelled to a great Degree towards the Spring of the Year 1729. And about the Beginning of *June* following, the pointed Leaf in the middle of the Plant quite open'd itſelf, and ſmaller Leaves appeared to the Number of 6 or 7, which is a certain Mark of Flowering; for this was obſerv'd on the 8th of *June*, and the Bloſſom-bud, or Stem-bud appeared above the Plant on the 10th of the ſame Month.

The Bud appeared at its firſt ſhooting like the Bud of an *Aſparagus*, about 13 or 14 Inches in Circumference, and roſe gradually higher and higher, growing about 7 Inches taller every Day at firſt, and afterwards about 5 or 6 Inches in a

Day, decreaſing ſtill in its Growth, as it arrived nearer to its intended Height; ſpreading into Branches as the Stem mounted, till the whole of the flowering Stem was 20 Feet high, and 17 Inches in Circumference at the Bottom.

This ſurprizing Growth of the Flower-Stem, and its Branches, was performed in about 17 Weeks, and then was at a ſeeming Stand for about 3 Weeks more, while the Flower-buds were forming themſelves for Bloſſom.

The Number of Branches ſpreading from this Stem were 30, ſo gracefully diſpoſed, as to form the Figure of a Pyramid; at the End of each Branch was a Cluſter of Flowers, to the Number of about 110; ſo that by Computation, the Plant had not fewer Bloſſoms upon it than 3300.

The Length of each Flower, perfectly blown, was about 3 Inches, the Bottom green, and the upper Part yellowiſh; from the Centre of each Flower proceeded a *Piſtillum* about 2 Inches long, encompaſſed by 6 *Stamina* and *Apices*, which projected about an Inch above the Flower.

The *Apices*, when they open, are cover'd with a Duſt much yellower than the Colour of the Flower Leaves; each Flower contained near a Tea-ſpoonful of ſweet Juice like Honey, which riſe in ſo great Quantity, as to over-flow between the *Petals* or divided Leaf of the Flower.

Some of this Liquor was ſaved in a Phial, which in a few Days became as foetid to the Smell, as the Liquor freſh gather'd was ſweet to the Taſte.

The Seed Pods were about 2 Inches long, very green on the Outſide, and the *Ovaries* within them, like thoſe in the *Piſtillum* of the *Tulip*.

A Deſcription of the Leaves, or bottom Part of this Plant.

It bears large long Leaves of a pale green Colour, whereon is to be ſeen an Eye of Blue or Aſh-colour being 5 Feet long, or more, and 2 or 3 Inches thick in the main Parts, and dented about the Edges, where they are thinneſt, with hard ſharp Teeth, or Thorns, and ending in a hard, a hard, round, and large blackiſh Thorn, as big as a Falcon's, (or large Hawk's) Claw or Talon. Which Leaves are round on the under Side, and channell'd or made hollow like a Gutter on the upper Side, and at the Bottom encompaſs one another. In the middle of theſe Leaves, riſeth a ſtrong, great, ſpongy Stalk, of the bigneſs of a Man's Arm, with a few ſmall dry and browniſh Leaves ſparſedly ſet thereon.

But here I cannot paſs by obſerving a Piece of extraordinary Management which was had with this ALOE. For by ſome accidental Bruiſe in the Shank of the Plant, the main Trunk of the ALOE, or, as one may call it, the Body of the Plant, between the Root and the Leaves, began to rot on one Side, and continued ſo to do till there was little Room left of ſaving it. The Plant then was cut clear from the Root, and the rotten Part clean cut off, laying the ALOE to dry in the Sun, that the Wound might heal and dry before it was replanted in the Earth. In the mean time was prepar'd ſome fine, free and rich dry

Earth, into which the ALOE was put, and in a Month or two the Plant had ſhot Roots that almoſt filled the Tub; and from that time it began to grow vigorouſly, till at length it came to produce the Bloſſom before deſcribed.

Some proper *Directions*, with reſpect to the *Care* which ſhould be taken of this *Sort* of ALOE, when you perceive it coming to Flower.

Firſt, Erect a Frame with Glaſs in the Front towards the South, keeping it open at the Top till the Flower-Stem grows above it, and then raiſe your Building a Story higher, and as the Plant grows taller, continue to raiſe your Fabrick, till you perceive it is at its full Height, and then cover it in. By this Method of proceeding, the Flower-Stem will be ſome Feet higher than it will by being left expos'd to the open Air, for if you have a Mind to draw the Flowering-Stem of any Plant in an extraordinary Manner, you muſt confine the ambient Air from the Sides of the Stem, and let the Top of the Plant meet the open Air: which is the way you ſhould uſe in drawing the *Campanula* or *Amaranths* to an Height extraordinary.

I ſhall conclude this Chapter with ſome *Directions* for the *Culture* of this *Sort* of ALOE.

I ſay of this Sort, for there are above 30 Sorts of ALOES, but this is accounted the moſt hardy of any of the *American* Sorts, therefore requires no more than common Shelter in a Green-Houſe during the Winter Seaſon, and in that time ſhould have very little or no Water: and ſpecial Care muſt be taken, that you keep the Crown or Center of the Plant free from Wet; which, if any ſhould lodge there, the Plant will be in danger of Rotting.

If you have a Mind to make the Plant ſhoot large Leaves, and grow vigorouſly, you ſhould every Spring give it freſh Earth towards the Surface of the Pot or Tub, obſerving to keep the Leaves as free as poſſible from touching it, and let it have Room enough to ſpread its Roots freely.

The beſt ſort of Caſe for this Plant, when it grows large, is a ſquare Box, ſo made, as to open on every Side, that you may more eaſily give it freſh Earth, and examine the State of the Leaves on the under Side. The Earth the moſt proper for it, ſhould be light and finely ſifted.

But if you would have it increaſe plentifully, then the Roots muſt be confined in a narrow Compaſs, and the Plant kept dry: It will then fling out abundance of Off-ſets; which being taken off, and tranſplanted into Pots of freſh Earth, preſently grow.

The beſt Time of tranſplanting the Off-ſets is from *April* till the End of *July*.

CHAP. II.

Of the Uſe of this Plant.

THE Inhabitants of *Mexico*, where this Plant grows common, make many conſiderable USES of it; that is to ſay, The mighty tall and ſtrong Flower Stalks, being dried, ſerve for *Fuel* to burn, as well as the Leaves when they are dry. The hollow or channell'd Leaves of this Plant ſerve them inſtead of *Tiles* to cover their Houſes, and ſhelter them from Rain; which they can ſo well diſpoſe, that no other Thing with them there can better perform that Office. Moreover, the Prieſts and Painters of thoſe Countries, uſe the Leaves to write and draw Figures upon, inſtead of Paper; which may well enough be done, while the Leaves are Green, with a Pin or fine Needle, or with one of the ſharp Thorns growing at the Ends of the Leaves; which Spines are ſo ſharp-pointed and ſtrong, that they are uſed as *Awls* to make Holes with in ſuch Bodies as are hard Subſtances; and that the Threads in the Leaf are ſtrong and uſeful to tie any thing with; and being ſpun, will make as ſtrong Thread as any Hemp can make.

CLUSIUS informs us, that while he was Reſident at *Seville* in *Spain*, his Landlord's Daughter ſhewed him Cloth made of the Threads of this ALOE, which ſhe had wrought into *Shirts*, but when the Strings of the Leaves were coarſer dreſt, they were platted together and made into *Sandals*, and alſo into *Ropes* and *Cordage*, and likewiſe into *Matts* for Floors, to walk upon, and into ſhort coarſe Garments for Sailors, and ſuch like, who are much expos'd to the Weather.

The Leaf of the Plant is ſo ſharp-pointed at the Extremity, and ſo full of Spines on the Edges, (as was ſaid before) together with an uncommon Strength in it, that in the *Weſt-Indies* this ALOE is planted by way of *Fence*; and is ſo rude in its Growth, that neither *Man* nor *Horſe*, nor any *Wild Beaſt*, can paſs through or penetrate.

In a Climate ſo favourable as that is, where they are generally us'd in this manner, there is a continued Summer, which makes them grow as much in one Year, as the ſame Plant will do with us in Ten, as ſeveral Gentlemen of great Worth have affirmed; and it is not unreaſonable to think ſo, ſince a Peach-Tree, from a Stone planted there, will bear Fruit the ſecond Year after ſetting or ſowing: and even in *Italy*, which is not ſo warm a Climate as where our ALOE naturally grows, a Peach-Tree ſent from *England* has grown 20 Feet high in one Year. Which ſhews how much the Plants differ in ſeveral Climates; and particularly this is mention'd, becauſe ſome Merchants have affirmed, that in *Peru*, *Mexico*, *Brazil*, and ſome other Parts adjacent, the great ALOE bloſſoms in 10 or 12 Years: but I ſuppoſe that theſe Plantations of ALOES might be made at different times, and ſo might produce Flowering Stems from Year to Year, according to their Growth or Length of Life.

Another *Uſe* which the great *American* ALOE was ſaid to be put to, is, that it was ADAM's Needle and Thread: 'Tis indeed not a little merry to hear what is got into ſome People's Heads about it, (that is to ſay) that becauſe it has a ſharp Point at the End of the Leaf, and has fine Strings join'd to that Point, which run the whole Length of the Leaf, it might ſerve, before Needles were invented, to ſew the Fig-Leaves together; but I muſt take Notice here that by Tradition, the *Jucca* is likewiſe call'd ADAM's Needle; and that it is an *African* Plant, and has not only a ſharp-pointed Leaf, but many Strings adhering to the Point: and if that really was the Caſe, ſuch a Plant might be uſed in Paradiſe on ſuch an Occaſion; for the Learned agree, that *America* was not known till *Columbus*'s Time, and therefore our ALOE could not be known in the firſt Times. But to return from this

Digreſſion, it is neceſſary to give an Account further, how far uſeful our *American* ALOE is among the Moderns, with regard to the *Silk* or *Thread* that is taken from the Leaves.

The *Threads* which run through the Leaves are very fine, ſmall, and ſilken, of a fine white Colour, when they are well clean'd, ſo that a fine Point or Lace is made of them; and theſe Strings will bear dying of ſeveral Colours. The KING of *Spain* had ſome White and ſome Blue Lace or Point ſent by one of his Vice-Roys of the *Spaniſh Weſt-Indies*, and with theſe, ſome of the Silk or Thread fit for Working; one Sort of the natural White Colour, and the other dy'd Blue: Part of which *Cargoe* his *Spaniſh* Majeſty ſent as a curious Preſent to LEWIS 14th King of *France*. Which Curioſity he was pleas'd to communicate to the Royal Academy of *Paris*, and to his Profeſſor of BOTANY Dr. *De Juſſieu*, who gave Dr. *Bradley* ſome Specimens of each Sort, which he brought into *England*.

The Method abroad of Dreſſing the Leaves for Thread or Silk.

They cut the Leaves their full Length, and lay them in Water till the pulpy part rots, and then with Mallets beat them, till the rotted ſpongy part is quite diſcharged from the Fibres or Veſſels that make the principal part of the Leaf. For if they beat the Leaf while 'tis freſh, they muſt waſh it in ſeveral Pails of Water, during the Time it is under that Diſcipline; for the *Juice* of it freſh, has little leſs Force than that of *Cantharides*, or *Spaniſh-Flies*: it will ſting the Hands and Face violently, where it happens to light; and if a Piece of the freſh Leaf be apply'd to the Hand or Foot, or any other part of the Body for a little Time, it will raiſe a Bliſter on the Part where 'tis laid. The Liquor boil'd makes a Lee, or *Lixivium*, much more penetrating and pungent, than that of the *Pot-Aſh* and *Pearl-Aſh*. A certain Perſon, who was indiſpos'd with an high Fever, was advis'd to apply *Poultices* made of this Aloe Leaf bruis'd, to his Feet and Wriſts, and in two Days the Poultices rais'd many ſmall Bliſters on the Places where they were apply'd to. The Juice is certainly of a very warm Nature, and will take the Skin off the Fleſh, if it be apply'd for a Day or two on any tender Part.

If a Piece of the Leaf be uſed as you do a Spunge, or a Wiſp of Straw dipt in Lee (or Lye) it will ſcour Pewter better than any Lye that can be made: But it will make the Hands ſmart the Day after.

It would ſurely be well worth the while of ſome Chymiſts to try Experiments with it; for though the Leaves abound in Fibres, yet every Leaf will yield a good Quantity of Juice, ſufficient to make any Experiment.

It is believed it may be of Uſe in diſſolving of *Metals*, and likewiſe that it will make a very ſtrong *Cauſtic*, much more fiery than any that is uſed at preſent.

When they dreſs the Leaves, they find the Veſſels, which are the Threads or Silk, not only running long-ways from the Top-Spine to the Root of each Leaf, but are joyn'd all the way with ſmall Fibres, about an Inch aſunder; ſo that the whole appears like a *Caſting-Net* for catching of Fiſh, ſpreading, if it be laid out, about a Yard at Bottom, and tapers all the way to the ſharp Point at the Top.

When the Leaf is ſo far dreſſed, a Comb muſt be uſed to it, and drawn directly downwards; which will diſcharge all the ſtraight Strings from the collateral Fibres, and ſo render them fit for Working either Lace or Point. They ſhould be often comb'd in order to make the Strings ſmooth and clean, and they may then be dy'd of any Colour.

The Strings of this Leaf, when they are more coarſely dreſſed, are uſed to make Cordage, and a Sort of Packthread, which the *Indians* weave into *Hammocks*, and will bear the Weather much better than Hemp. They alſo make Nets of it for taking of *Deer*, and catching of *Fiſh*; and, in ſhort, it may be uſed for any thing in ſuch ways, where Hemp and Flax are uſed. Theſe Strings are of that Strength, that 'tis with great Difficulty you can break one of them; they are of great Uſe in *Angling* to faſten Hooks to, being ſtronger than the *Indian* Graſs, or ſtrongeſt Horſe-Hairs.

CHAP. III.

Of the large common American ALOE *that is now in Bloom in the Gardens of* George Montgomerie *Eſq*; *at* Chippenham, *near* Newmarket, *in the County of* Cambridge.

THIS Plant began to open its Crown for Flowering the latter End of *May* 1759, that is, the central Leaf, or middle Spire, began to ſplit and crack, and the pointed Leaf in the middle of the Plant quite open'd itſelf on the 15th of *June*, and on the 22d Day of the ſame Month the Bloſſom-bud, or Stem-bud, appear'd above the Plant.

The Bud at its firſt Shooting appear'd like the Bud of an Aſparagus, about 12 or 13 Inches in Circumference, and roſe gradually higher and higher, growing about four Inches and an half taller every Day at firſt; and afterwards not ſo much, decreaſing ſtill in its Growth, as it grew nearer to its full Height.

It ſpread into Branches as it grew higher, much like thoſe of Sconces, or a Chandelier, the whole of the Flowering Stem is 24 Feet 3 Inches high, and 17 Inches and an half in Circumference at the Bottom.

This ſurprizing Growth of the Flower Stem, and its Branches, was perform'd in 10 Weeks and 5 Days.

The Number of Branches ſpreading from this Stem are 30, diſpoſed ſo gracefully as to form the Figure of a Pyramid; at the End of each Branch is a Cluſter of Flowers, taking one with another, to the Number of about 130; ſo that according to this Computation the Aloe has not leſs than 3900 Bloſſoms on it. *(See the Plate or Frontiſpiece.)*

The Length of each Flower, perfectly blown, is about three Inches, the bottom part green, and the upper part yellow, the Flower reſembling that of a yellow Narciſſus, a great Quantity of ſweet Juice,

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like Honey, keeps dropping from each Flower.

This Plant is 104 Years old; it (and another which dy'd in the hard Winter in 1739) was a Preſent made from His Majeſty King William the Third, to the Right Honourable *Edward Ruſſel*, Earl of Orford: It was 40 Years old when it was brought to *Chippenham-Hall*, and has been in *Chippenham* Gardens 64 Years.

The END.

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